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# MYTHOLOGY AND FOLK-TALES OF THE NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS.

BY FRANZ BOAS.

## I. MATERIAL.

DURING the last twenty years a very considerable body of tales of the North American Indians has been collected. Before their publication, almost the only important collections available for scientific research were the Eskimo tales published by H. Rink, — material recorded in part by natives during the earlier part of the nineteenth century, and printed also in the native language in Greenland; the traditions collected by E. Petitot among the Athapascan tribes of northwestern Canada; the Ponca tales collected by J. O. Dorsey; a few Siouan tales recorded by Stephen R. Riggs; and the Klamath traditions collected by Albert S. Gatschet. The material published in Daniel G. Brinton's "Library of Aboriginal American Literature" also deserves notice. In all of these the attempt was made to give a faithful rendering of the native tales; and in this they differ fundamentally from the literary efforts of Schoolcraft, Kohl, and other writers. Owing to their scope, they are also much more valuable than the older records found in the accounts of missionaries and in books of travel and exploration.

Since those times, somewhat systematic collections have been made among a large number of tribes; and, although the continent is not by any means covered by the existing material, much has been gained to give us a better knowledge of the subject.

Two types of collection may be distinguished. The one includes tales taken down in English or in other European tongues directly from natives, or indirectly with the help of interpreters. Among American institutions, the Bureau of American Ethnology, the American Museum of Natural History, the Field Museum of Natural History (Field Columbian Museum) in Chicago, for a few years the Carnegie Institution of Washington, have worked in this field. Much material is also found in the "Journal of American Folk-Lore," and in the earlier volumes of the "American Anthropologist" and of the "American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal." The other type of collection contains tales taken down from dictation by natives, or recorded in the native language by natives, and later on revised and edited. So far, the latter form the smaller group. We have somewhat extended material from East Greenland, the Alaskan Eskimo,

from several Athapascan tribes, from four tribes from the coast of British Columbia, three Chinook tribes, three Oregon tribes, five Californian tribes; some Pima, Apache, and Navaho material; Iroquois, Blackfoot, and Fox texts; and collections from the Ponca and Sioux. Publications of this type were due first of all to the Bureau of American Ethnology. For a time the American Museum of Natural History published a considerable body of texts; and similar work has been conducted by the University of California in Berkeley, the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, and more systematically by the American Ethnological Society and in the Anthropological Publications of Columbia University in New York. The Geological Survey of Canada is also beginning to make available material of this type. The material collected by Professor Uhlenbeck and Dr. de Jong among the Blackfeet should also be mentioned in this connection.

With the increase of material, the demands for accuracy of record have become more and more stringent. While in the earlier period of collecting no great stress was laid upon the recording of variants and their provenience, — as, for instance, in Rink's collection, in which we have variants from different parts of the country combined into a single story, — we now desire that each tale be obtained from several informants and from several places, in order to enable us to gain an impression of its importance in the tribal lore, and to insure the full record of its contents and of its relations to other tales. Furthermore, the importance of the record in the original language has become more and more apparent. This is not only for the reason that the English translation gives a very inadequate impression of the tales, but also because often the interpreter's inadequate knowledge of English compels him to omit or modify important parts. Even the best translation cannot give us material for the study of literary form, — a subject that has received hardly any attention, and the importance of which, as I hope to show in the course of these remarks, cannot be overestimated.

It is doubtful whether all the records that have been collected in previous years are well adapted to this study, because the difficulty of taking down accurately rapid dictation from natives, and the difficulty which the natives encounter in telling in the traditional manner sufficiently slowly for the purpose of the recorder, almost always exert an appreciable influence upon the form of the tale. Owing to the multiplicity of American languages and to the exigencies of the situation in which students find themselves, the recorder has only rarely a practical command of the language; and for this reason the difficulty just mentioned cannot be readily overcome. Up to the present time, the most successful method has been to have the first

record made by natives who have been taught to write their own language. After they have acquired sufficient ease in writing, the diction generally becomes satisfactory. A certain one-sidedness will remain, however, as long as all the material is written down by a single recorder. It has also been suggested that phonographic records be used, which may be written out from re-dictation; but so far, no extended series has been collected in this manner.

The experience of investigators in many regions suggests that the difficulty just mentioned is not as great as might be supposed. This is indicated by the fact that good informants often break down completely when requested to dictate descriptions of the events of everyday life. They will then state that they are well able to tell stories that have a fixed form, but that the slow dictation of descriptions to be made up new is too difficult for them. It would seem, therefore, that the form in which most of the tales are obtained must be fairly well fixed. Ordinarily a poor rendering of a story can easily be recognized by the fragmentary character of the contents, the briefness of sentences, by corrections and unnecessary repetitions. We also have many tales in which the same incident is repeated a number of times; and in those cases the form of the repetitions shows, on the whole, whether the narrator has a fairly good command of his subject. Furthermore, a great many native tales contain, besides the connected narrative, stereotyped formulas, which are always told in the same manner, and which are undoubtedly always given in correct form.

It has been the habit of most collectors to endeavor to find the "right" informant for tales, particularly when the stories refer to elaborate sacred rituals, or when they are the property of social groups possessing definite privileges. It may then be observed that certain tales are in the keeping of individuals, and are only superficially or partially known to the rest of the people. In these cases the recorder has often adopted the attitude of the Indian who possesses the most elaborate variant of the tale, and the fragmentary data given by the uninitiated are rejected as misleading. This view is based on the assumption of a permanence of form of tradition that is hardly justifiable, and does not take into consideration the fact that the esoteric variant which is developed by a small number of individuals is based on the exoteric variants afloat among the whole tribe. We shall revert to this subject later on.

This static view of Indian folk-lore is also expressed by the preference given throughout to the collection of purely Indian material unaffected by European or African elements, and by the reluctance of investigators to bestow as much care upon the gathering of the more recent forms of folk-lore as is given to those forms that were current before the advent of the whites. For the study of the development of folk-

tales the modern material is of particular value, because it may enable us to understand better the processes of assimilation and of adaptation, which undoubtedly have been of great importance in the history of folk-tradition.

## II. MYTH AND FOLK-TALE.

In our American collections the two terms "myth" and "folk-tale" have been used somewhat indefinitely. This is a necessary result of the lack of a sharp line of demarcation between these two classes of tales. No matter which of the current definitions of mythology we may adopt, there will arise difficulties that cannot be settled without establishing arbitrary distinctions. If we define myths as tales that explain natural phenomena, and that may be considered in this sense as parts of an interpretation of nature, we are confronted with the difficulty that the same tale may be explanatory in one case, and a simple tale without explanatory features in another. The strict adherence to this principle of classification would therefore result in the separation of tales that are genetically connected, one being classed with myths, the other with folk-tales. It goes without saying that in this way unnecessary difficulties are created.

If we make the personification of animals, plants, and natural phenomena the standard of distinction, another kind of difficulty arises, which is based on the lack of a clear distinction between myths, on the one hand, and tales relating to magical exploits that are considered as true and of recent occurrence, on the other, and also on the similarities between tales relating to the adventures of human beings and animals.

Of similar character are the obstacles that stand in the way of a definition of myths as tales relating to ritualistic performances.

In all these cases the same tales will have to be considered, in one case as myths, and in another as folk-tales, because they occur both in explanatory and non-explanatory forms, relating to personified animals or natural objects and to human beings, with ritualistic significance and without it. If we do accept any one of these definitions, it will therefore always be necessary to consider the two groups together, and to investigate their historical and psychological development without regard to the artificial limits implied in the definition. This difficulty cannot be met by assuming that the folk-tale originated from a myth and must be considered a degenerate myth, or by the hypothesis that conversely the myth originated from a folk-tale; for, if we do this, a theoretical point of view, that should be the end of the inquiry, is injected into our consideration.

For our purposes it seems desirable to adhere to the definition of myth given by the Indian himself. In the mind of the American native there exists almost always a clear distinction between two

classes of tales. One group relates incidents which happened at a time when the world had not yet assumed its present form, and when mankind was not yet in possession of all the customs and arts that belong to our period. The other group contains tales of our modern period. In other words, tales of the first group are considered as myths; those of the other, as history. The tales of the former group are not by any means explanatory in character throughout. They treat mostly of the achievements of animals and of heroes. From our modern point of view, it might be doubtful sometimes whether such a tale should be considered as mythical, or historical, since, on account of the Indian's belief in the powers of animals, many of the historical tales consist of a series of incidents that might as well have happened in the mythological period; such as the appearance of animals that become supernatural helpers and perform marvellous exploits, or of those that initiate a person into a new ritual. It can be shown that historical tales may in the course of time become mythical tales by being transferred into the mythical period, and that historical tales may originate which parallel in the character and sequence of their incidents mythical tales. Nevertheless the psychological distinction between the two classes of tales is perfectly clear in the mind of the Indian. It is related, in a way, to the ancient concepts of the different ages as described by Hesiod.

For our analytical study we must bear in mind that the psychological distinction which the natives make between mythical and historical tales is, from an historical point of view, not more definitely and sharply drawn than the line of demarcation between myths and tales defined in other ways. The point of view, however, has the advantage that the myths correspond to concepts that are perfectly clear in the native mind. Although folk-tales and myths as defined in this manner must therefore still be studied as a unit, we have avoided the introduction of an arbitrary distinction through our modern critical point of view, and retained instead the one that is present in the minds of the myth-telling people.

The mythical tales belong to a period that is long past, and cannot be repeated in our world, although the expectation may exist of a renewal of mythical conditions in the dim future. Only when we ourselves are transferred into the realm of mythical beings, that continue to exist somewhere in unknown parts of our world, may myths again become happenings. The mythological beings may thus become actors in historical folk-tales or in localized tradition, although they appear at the same time as actors in true myths. The Indian who disappears and is taken to the village of the Buffaloes is, in the mind of the Indian, the hero of an historical tale, although the Buffalo men are at the same time mythical personages. The novice initiated

by the spirits of a secret society is taken away by them bodily; and when he re-appears among his tribesmen, he tells them his story, which deals with the gifts of mythical beings. The person who revives from a death-like trance has been in communion with the mythical world of the ghosts, although he has been allowed to return to our world and to follow his usual occupations.

It is therefore clear that in the mind of the Indian the appearance of mythical characters is not the criterion of what constitutes a myth. It is rather its distance in space or time that gives it its characteristic tone.

It appears from these remarks that in the study of the historical origin of myths and folk-tales of modern times, the widest latitude must be given to our researches. The types and distribution of the whole body of folk-tales and myths must form the subject of our inquiry. The reconstruction of their history will furnish the material which may help us to uncover the psychological processes involved.

I cannot agree with Bastian and Wundt,<sup>1</sup> who consider the question how tales actually originated as comparatively insignificant, because both independently created and disseminated material are subject to the same psychological processes, which may therefore be studied by an analytical treatment of the tales as they now exist. I do not see how this can be done without interpreting as an historical sequence a classification based entirely on psychological or other considerations, — a method that can never lead to satisfactory results, on account of the arbitrary, non-historical premises on which it is founded. If there is more than one classification of this type possible, the reconstructed psychological processes will differ accordingly; and we must still demand that the change from one type to another be demonstrated by actual historical evidence when available, by inferences based on distribution or similar data when no other method can be utilized. Here, as in all other ethnological problems, the principle must be recognized that phenomena apparently alike may develop in multitudinous ways. A geometrical design may be developed from a conventionalized realistic form, or it may develop directly through a play with elementary technical motives; a semi-realistic form may be a copy of nature, and may have been read into a pre-existing geometrical design; or both may have been borrowed and developed on new lines. A ritual may be a dramatic presentation of a myth, it may be an ancient rite to which a myth has become attached, or it may be a copy of foreign patterns. There is no *a priori* reason that tells us which has been the starting-point of a local development, for the modern forms may have grown up in any of these ways or by their joint action. At the same time, the psychological processes that

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie*, vol. ii, part 3 (1909), p. 62.

come into play in one case or the other are distinct. For this reason we insist on the necessity of an inductive study of the sequence of events as the basis for all our work.

The results of these inquiries, however, do not touch upon another problem upon which much thought has been bestowed. The beings that appear as actors in mythological tales are creatures of the imagination, and differ in the most curious ways from the beings which are known in our every-day world. Animals that are at the same time men, human beings that consist of parts of a body or are covered with warts and blotches, beings that may at will increase or decrease in size, bodies that may be cut up and will readily re-unite and come to life, beings that are swallowed by animals or monsters and pass through them unharmed, are the ordinary inventory of folk-tales as well as of myths. Whatever is nowhere seen and whatever has never happened are here the common every-day events.

The imagination of man knows no limits, and we must expect great variety of form in mythical beings and happenings. While such diversity is found, there still exist certain features that occur with surprising frequency, — in fact, so often that their presence cannot be due to accident. The attention of many investigators has been directed to these similarities, which have led to the inference that those traits that are common to the myths and folk-tales of diverse peoples and races are the fundamental elements of mythology, and that our real problem is the discovery of the origin of those most widely spread.

It would seem that much of the conflict of current opinion is due to our failure to keep distinctly apart the two lines of inquiry here characterized, — the one, the investigation into the history of tales; the other, the investigation of the origin of traditions or ideas common to many or all mythologies.

### III. DISSEMINATION OF FOLK-TALES.

Our first problem deals with the development of modern folk-tales. During the last twenty years the tendency of American investigators has been to disregard the problem of the earliest history of American myths and tales, and to gain an insight into their recent growth. The first step in an inductive study of the development of folk-tales must be an investigation of the processes that may be observed at the present time, and these should form the basis of inquiries into earlier history. Therefore stress has been laid upon the accumulation of many variants of the same tale from different parts of the country, and these have been made the basis of a few theoretical studies.

Not more than twenty-five years ago Daniel G. Brinton asserted that the similarity of Iroquois and Algonkin mythologies was due to the sameness of the action of the human mind, not to transmission.



Since that time such a vast amount of material has been accumulated, proving definite lines of transmission, that there is probably no investigator now who would be willing to defend Brinton's position. A detailed study of transmission among the tribes of the North Pacific coast, and a brief summary of the similarities between Navaho and Northwest American folk-tales, were followed by many annotated collections containing parallels from many parts of America. The importance of dissemination was brought out incidentally in Dr. Lowie's investigation on the test-theme in American mythology and by Dr. Waterman's study of the explanatory element in American folk-tales.

Two rules have been laid down as necessary for cautious progress.<sup>1</sup>

First, the tale or formula the distribution of which is investigated, and is to be explained as due to historical contact, must be so complex, that an independent origin of the sequence of non-related elements seems to be improbable. An example of such a tale is the Magic Flight, in which we find a combination of the following elements: flight from an ogre; objects thrown over the shoulder forming obstacles, — first a stone, which becomes a mountain; then a comb, which becomes a thicket; lastly a bottle of oil, which becomes a body of water. It is hardly conceivable that such a group of unrelated incidents should arise independently in regions far apart.

The second rule is, that for a satisfactory proof of dissemination, continuous distribution is required. The simpler the tale, the greater must be our insistence on this condition. It must of course be admitted that simple tales may be disseminated over wide areas. It must also be admitted that in all probability tales known at one time have been forgotten, so that intermediate links in an area of geographically continuous distribution may have been lost. This, however, does not touch upon our methodological point of view. We desire to find uncontested evidence of transmission, not alone the possibility or plausibility of transmission; and for this purpose our safeguards must be insisted on.

The study of the distribution of themes requires a ready means for their identification, and this necessitates a brief terminology: hence the attempts to establish a series of catch-words by means of which tales and incidents may readily be recognized. Frobenius, Ehrenreich, Lowie, and Kroeber<sup>2</sup> have contributed to this undertaking; but an

<sup>1</sup> See Boas, "Dissemination of Tales among the Natives of North America" (*Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. iv, pp. 13-20); W. Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie*, vol. ii, part 3, p. 62; Van Gennep, *La formation des légendes* (1912), p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Leo Frobenius, *Im Zeitalter des Sonnengotts*; Paul Ehrenreich, *Die Mythen und Legenden der Südamerikanischen Urvölker*, pp. 34-59; Robert H. Lowie, "The Test-Theme in North American Mythology" (*Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xxi, p. 101); A. L. Kroeber, "Catch-Words in American Mythology" (*Ibid.*, vol. xxi, p. 222); see also T. T. Waterman, "The Explanatory Element in the Folk-Tales of the North American Indians" (*this Journal*, vol. xxvii, pp. 1-54).

elaboration of a satisfactory system of catch-words requires more penetrating study of the tales than those that have hitherto been made. Certain results, however, have been obtained from the study of the distribution of themes. The material that has been collected suggests that, as inquiry progresses, we may be able to discern various areas of distribution of themes. Some of these are known over large portions of the continent. For instance, the story of the Bungling Host — of a person who is fed by the magic powers of his host, who tries to imitate him and fails ignominiously — occurs from New Mexico on, all over the eastern part of North America, and is lacking only, as it seems, in California and on the Arctic coast. Similar to this is the distribution of the story of the Rolling Rock, which pursues an offending person, and pins him down until he is finally freed by animals that break the rock. Perhaps this does not extend quite so far north and south as the former story. While the Bungling-Host tale is known on the coast of British Columbia, the Rolling-Rock story does not reach the Pacific coast, although related tales are found in parts of California. Still other tales are essentially confined to the Great Plains, but have followed the trade-routes that lead to the Pacific Ocean, and are found in isolated spots from British Columbia southward to California. To this group belongs the story of the Dancing Birds, which are told by a trickster to dance with closed eyes, and then are killed by him, a few only escaping. Another story of this group is the characteristic Deluge story, which tells of the creation of a new earth by diving animals. During the Flood the animals save themselves on a raft. One after another dives, until finally the muskrat brings up some mud, of which the new earth is created. This story is known in a very wide area around the Great Lakes, and occurs in recognizable form on a few points along the Pacific coast. To this same group belongs the tale of the Star Husbands. Two girls sleep out of doors, see two stars, and each wishes one of these for her husband. When they awake the following morning, their wish is fulfilled. One of the stars is a beautiful man, the other is ugly. Eventually the girls return to earth. This tale is known from Nova Scotia, across the whole width of the continent, to the Western plateaus, Vancouver Island, and Alaska. Still other stories of the same area are those of the Blood-Clot Boy, who originates from some blood that has beenthrown away, and who becomes a hero; the story of Thrown-Away, the name for a boy who is cast out, brought up in a magic way, and who becomes a hero; the Snaring of the Sun; and many others.

The second group has a decided Western distribution, and is found extensively on the Plateaus and on the Pacific coast; although some of the stories have also crossed the mountains, and are found on the

Eastern Plains. To this group belongs the story of the Eye-Juggler; that is, of an animal that plays ball with his eyes, and finally loses them; of the ascent to the sky by means of a ladder of arrows; and the story of the contest between Beaver and Porcupine, Beaver inviting Porcupine to swim, while Porcupine invites Beaver to climb.<sup>1</sup>

A third area of distribution may be recognized in the peculiar migration legends of the Southwest and of the Mississippi basin, which have no analogues in the northern part of the continent.

The distribution of themes becomes the more interesting, the more carefully the tales are considered. Thus the widely spread story of the Bungling Host may be divided into a number of types, according to the tricks performed by the host. On the North Pacific coast occurs the trick of knocking the ankle, out of which salmon-eggs flow; on the Plateaus, the piercing of some part of the body with a sharp instrument and pulling out food; on the Plains, the transformation of bark into wood; and almost everywhere, the diving for fish from a perch.<sup>2</sup> There is little doubt that as collection proceeds, and the distribution of themes can be studied in greater detail, the areas of dissemination will stand out more clearly than now. The greatest difficulty at present lies in the absence of satisfactory material from the Southeast and from the Pueblo region.

Ehrenreich<sup>3</sup> has attempted to extend these comparisons to South America and to the Old World; but many of his cases do not conform to the methodological conditions previously outlined, and are therefore not quite convincing, although I readily admit the probability of dissemination between the southern and northern half of the continent. I am even more doubtful in regard to the examples given by Dähnhardt<sup>4</sup> and Frobenius.<sup>5</sup> If Dähnhardt finds, for instance, that we have in North America a group of tales relating how Raven liberated the sun, which was enclosed in a seamless round receptacle, that the Chukchee tell of Raven holding the sun under his tongue, that the Magyar tell a similar incident of one of the heroes of their fairy-tales, it does not follow that these are the same tales. The Chukchee and Magyar tales are alike, and I should be inclined to search for intermediate links. Among the Chukchee the story has been inserted in the Raven cycle, and it seems probable that the prominence of the

<sup>1</sup> See T. T. Waterman (*Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xxvii, pp. 1-54).

<sup>2</sup> Franz Boas, *Tsimshian Mythology* (31st Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology).

<sup>3</sup> P. Ehrenreich, *Die Mythen und Legenden der südamerikanischen Urvölker und ihre Beziehungen zu denen Nordamerikas und der Alten Welt*, 1905.

<sup>4</sup> O. Dähnhardt, *Natursagen*, vols. i-iv. References are given in the index to these volumes.

<sup>5</sup> Leo Frobenius, *Die Weltanschauung der Naturvölker*.

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raven in their folk-lore is due to Northwest-coast influences, or that it developed at the same time in northeastern Asia and northwestern America. However, I do not think that the two tales are sufficiently alike to allow us to claim that they have the same origin.

Still more is this true of the alleged relations between Melanesian and American tales. Frobenius, who makes much of these similarities, calls attention, for instance, to the motive of the arrow-ladder, which occurs in Melanesia and in Northwest America. It seems to me that the idea of a chain of arrows reaching from the earth to the sky is not so complicated as to allow us to assume necessarily a single origin. Furthermore, the distance between the two countries in which the element occurs is so great, and there is apparently such a complete absence of intermediate links, that I am not convinced of the sameness of the elements. Even the apparently complicated story of the Invisible Fish-Hook, which was recorded by Codrington, and which is common to Melanesia and Northwest America, does not convince me. The fisherman's hook is taken away by a shark; the fisherman loses his way, reaches the shark's village, where a person lies sick and cannot be cured by the shamans. The fisherman sees his hook in the sick person's mouth, takes it out, and thus cures him. In this formula we have the widely-spread idea that the weapons of spirits are invisible to mortals, and *vice versâ*; and the story seems to develop without difficulty wherever this idea prevails. The markedly close psychological connection of the incidents of the tale sets it off clearly from the Magic Flight referred to before, in which the single elements are quite without inner connection. Therefore the sameness of the formula, connected with the lack of intermediate links, makes the evidence for historical connection inconclusive.

I repeat, the question at issue is not whether these tales may be related, but whether their historical connection has been proved.

Transmission between the Old World and the New has been proved by the occurrence of a set of complex stories in both. The most notable among these are the Magic Flight (or obstacle myth), the story of the Island of Women (or of the toothed vagina), and that of the killing of the ogre whose head is infested with frogs instead of lice. The area of well-established Old-World influence upon the New World is confined to that part of North America limited in the southeast by a line running approximately from California to Labrador. Southeast of this line, only weak indications of this influence are noticeable. Owing to the restriction of the tales to a small part of America, and to their wide distribution in the Old World, we must infer that the direction of dissemination was from the west to the east, and not conversely. Every step forward from this well-established basis should be taken with the greatest caution.

A certain number of folk-tales are common to a more restricted area around the coasts of Bering Sea and the adjoining parts of Asia and America. Many of these may have had their origin in America. An extension of this inquiry is needed for clearing up the whole interrelation between the New World and the Old. The suggestion of analogies made by Ehrenreich, Dähnhardt, Frobenius, and others, is worthy of being followed up; but the proofs they have so far given are not convincing to me. Thus the theft of the sun and the bringing-up of the earth, to both of which I referred before; the story of the Swan Maidens who put off their clothing on the shore of a lake, assume human form, and are compelled to marry the hero who takes away their clothing, — are common property of America, Asia, and Europe. But the variations of these tales are considerable; and their complexity is not so great, nor their geographical distribution so continuous, as to claim that proof of their identity has been established.

We should also mention the possibility of contact between America and the Old World across the islands of the Pacific Ocean. Roland B. Dixon<sup>1</sup> has recently collected data that suggest possible contact along this line; and Von Hornbostel<sup>2</sup> has tried to show similarity on the basis of musical systems that in his opinion can be explained with difficulty only, unless there has been old historical contact. No convincing material, however, is found in the domain of folk-tales.

I have not considered in the preceding remarks the recent influx of foreign themes from Europe and Africa. A fairly large amount of European folk-lore material has been introduced into the United States and Canada. Among those Indian tribes, however, that still retain fresh in their memory the aboriginal mode of life, these tales are sharply set off from the older folk-tales. They are recognizable by distinctiveness of character, although their foreign origin is not always known to the natives. They belong largely to the fairy-tales of Europe, and most of them were probably carried to America by the French voyageurs. It is only in recent times that a more extensive amount of material of this kind has been accumulated.<sup>3</sup> Favorite stories of this group are "John the Bear," "Seven-Heads," and a few others of similar type.

In Nova Scotia and Quebec, where contact between the European settlers and the Indians has continued for a long period, the number of European elements in aboriginal folk-lore is much larger. They may have been derived in part from Scotch and Irish sources. Still

<sup>1</sup> Roland B. Dixon, "The Independence of the Culture of the American Indian" (*Science*, 1912, pp. 46-55).

<sup>2</sup> O. von Hornbostel, "Über ein akustisches Kriterium für Kulturzusammenhänge" (*Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 1911, pp. 601-615).

<sup>3</sup> Most of this material has been published in the *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vols. xxv-xxvii (1912-14); see also Rand, *Legends of the Micmacs*.

the distinction between the types of aboriginal and foreign tales is fairly clear, even to the minds of the narrators.

In the Southern States, where a large Negro population has come into contact with the Indians, we find introduced into the aboriginal folk-lore, in addition to the fairy tales, animal tales foreign to America. Since many of these are quite similar in type to aboriginal American folk-tales, the line of demarcation between the two groups has tended to become lost. Some of the foreign details have been incorporated in the folk-lore of the Southeastern Indians, and their distinct origin has been forgotten by them. A similar assimilation of the animal tale has been observed in isolated cases in other districts, as that of a La Fontaine fable among the Shuswap of British Columbia, and perhaps of a European folk-tale among the Zuñi. For this reason we may conclude that the complete amalgamation is due to their identity of type.

The conditions are quite different in Latin America, where, with the exception of the most isolated areas, native folk-tales have almost given way to European material. The bulk of the tales collected in Mexico and South America is of the same character as the folk-tales of the American Negroes, and belongs to the same cycle to which they belong. Since Negro influence cannot readily be shown over this whole district, and since much of the correlated material is clearly European, the origin of these tales is plausibly referred to Spanish and Portuguese sources. They were probably carried to America at the time of the Conquest, taken to Africa by the Portuguese, and later on imported into the United States by Negroes who had previously adopted them in Africa. The definite solution of this problem would require careful collections in Spain. The published Portuguese material is not unfavorable to this theory, which is also supported by the occurrence of the same tales in the Philippine Islands, that have been so long under Spanish influence. It is true that some tales of this group that are found in southern Asia may be due to East-Indian influences, but the form of those hitherto published is rather in favor of the theory of a late Spanish origin. It seems likely that along with these tales the Negroes brought some African stories of similar character into North America.

Among the elements that have been introduced into our continent in this way, I mention the Magic Flight, which has thus been carried in two currents into the New World, — an ancient one, coming from Siberia by way of Bering Strait; a recent one, arising in Spain, and passing into Latin America, and gradually extending northward until the two meet in northern California.

It is not easy to say when this superposition of the ancient American lore by new European material in Latin America was accomplished.

There are, however, indications favoring the assumption that some of it has had time to influence American tribes that did not come directly into intimate contact with Spanish cultural elements. Thus the tale of the race between Turtle and Rabbit — in which Turtle places his brothers, who look just like him, all along various points of the race-track, and thus makes Rabbit believe that he has won — has entered northward into Oregon and British Columbia; and a number of incidents that occur in Vancouver Island and in the interior of British Columbia may have to be explained in the same way. The general question of the influence of European lore upon our aboriginal tradition deserves much more careful attention than it has hitherto received.

#### IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF MYTHOLOGICAL AREAS.

We return to the discussion of the aboriginal lore as it is found in our times, disregarding those elements that can be proved to be of modern introduction. The material collected in different parts of the continent presents marked differences in type. These are due to several causes. In some cases the themes contained in the tales are distinct; in others the actors are different; the point of the stories shows certain local peculiarities; or the formal structure possesses local characteristics. Among these features, attention has been directed particularly to the first three, although no systematic attempts have been made to cover the whole field.

In the preceding chapter I have discussed the dissemination of tales, and at the same time pointed out that they are not evenly distributed over the whole continent. It does not seem possible to give a definite characterization of those themes that form the constituent elements of the folk-tales of these larger areas.

The actors that appear as the heroes of our tales differ greatly in various parts of the continent. While in Alaska and northern British Columbia the Raven is the hero of a large cycle of tales, we find that farther to the south, first the Mink, then the Bluejay, takes his place. On the Western Plateaus Coyote is the hero, and in many parts of the Plains the Rabbit is an important figure. In other regions, heroes of human form appear. These occur sporadically along the Pacific coast, but in much more pronounced form on the Great Plains and in the Mackenzie area, without, however, superseding entirely the animal heroes. Owing to this difference in the form of the actors, we find the same tales told of Rabbit, Coyote, Raven, Mink, and Bluejay, but also of such beings as culture-heroes or human tricksters among the Algonkin, Sioux, Ponca, and Blackfeet. There is almost no limit to these transfers from one actor to another. The story of the Bungling Host is, for instance, told of all these beings, and other themes are transferred from one to another with equal ease. Analogous transfers

occur frequently in the case of other figures that are less prominent in the folk-tales. The sun is snared by Mouse, Rabbit, or beings in human form. Gull and a person appear as owners of the sun. Kingfisher, Water-Ouzel, or other birds, play the rôle of hosts. Chicken-Hawk, Gopher, Deer, or Eagle steal the fire. Fox, Opossum, or Rabbit dupe the Coyote. In part, the animals that appear in tales are determined by the particular fauna of each habitat; but, even aside from this, numerous transfers occur. In how far these changes may be characteristic, aside from the changes of the main figure, has not yet been determined.

The third point in regard to which the materials of various areas show characteristic differences is their formal composition; for the impression that certain types of stories are characteristic of definite areas is not due mainly to the selection of themes that they contain, and of the actors, but to the fundamental ideas underlying the plots, and to their general composition, — if I may use the term, to their literary style.

Here a remark should be made in regard to the manner in which the accumulated material has been utilized for the purpose of theoretical discussion. When it is merely a question of discussing themes and actors, it may perhaps be justifiable to be satisfied with data collected without particular precautions. On the whole, I do not think that the study of the distribution of tales has been seriously vitiated by the use of unsatisfactory records, although even here a certain amount of caution must be demanded. When Dähnhardt makes use of a collection like Phillips's "*Totem Tales*," he vitiates his statements, because neither is the provenience of the tales given correctly — Alaskan tales, for instance, being told as collected in Puget Sound — nor are the contents sufficiently reliable to serve as a basis for conclusions. The tales are throughout changed and modified so as to satisfy the literary taste of the author. Too little attention has been paid by students to the necessity of a critical examination of their material. Such criticism becomes imperative when the formal composition is to be made the subject of serious study. It is necessary to know exactly what is native, and what may be due to the literary taste of the recorder; and what may be due to the individual informant, and what may be tribal characteristic. It is here that the importance of unadulterated text-material becomes particularly apparent. The neglect of all critical precautions, which is so characteristic of the manner in which ethnological material is habitually used, has vitiated the results of students, not only in the field of mythology and folk-lore, but perhaps even more in the study of customs and beliefs; and the time has come when the indiscriminate use of unsifted material must end.

In a way we may speak of certain negative features that are com-



mon to the tales of the whole American continent. The moralizing fable, which is so widely spread in Europe, Asia, and Africa, seems to be entirely absent in America. Professor Van Gennep has claimed that all primitive folk-tales must be moral.<sup>1</sup> This is true in so far as the plots of all primitive folk-tales find a happy solution, and must therefore conform to those standards that are accepted by the narrators.<sup>2</sup> This, however, is not the same as the moralizing point of the story, that is the peculiar character of the fable of the Old World. Although the American tale may be and has been applied by Indians for inculcating moral truths, this tendency is nowhere part and parcel of the tale. Examples of the moral application of a tale have been given by Swanton<sup>3</sup> from Alaska, and by Miss Fletcher<sup>4</sup> from the Pawnee. In none of these, however, has the tale itself the moral for its point. It is rather a more or less far-fetched application of the tale made by the narrator. The tale can therefore not be classed with the African, Asiatic, and European animal tales, the whole point of which is the moral that is expressed at the end. It seems to me very likely that the almost complete absence of proverbs among the American natives is connected with the absence of the moralizing literary form, which among the Indians seems to be confined to the art of the orator who sometimes conveys morals in the form of metaphoric expression.

The attempt has been made to characterize one or two areas according to peculiarities of literary form. It is perhaps easiest thus to describe the folk-tales of the Eskimo, which differ from other American tales in that the fanciful animal tale with its transformation elements does not predominate.<sup>5</sup>

In other cases, however, the formal elements can be given clear expression only when the tales are grouped in a number of classes. Most important among these are the serious origin tales, the trickster tales, and tales the incidents of which develop entirely or essentially in human society. As soon as this division is made, it is found possible to distinguish a certain number of well-defined types.

We shall take up first of all the origin myths. It is a common trait

<sup>1</sup> *La formation des légendes* (1912), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Panzer, *Märchen, Sage und Dichtung* (Munich, 1905), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> John R. Swanton, *Tlingit Myths and Texts* (Bulletin 39, Bureau of American Ethnology).

<sup>4</sup> Alice C. Fletcher, *The Hako* (22d Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, part 2).

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Paul Radin states that the tales from Smith Sound published by Knud Rasmussen show that in Eskimo folk-lore the animal tale is as marked as among the Indians. This view does not seem to me warranted by the facts. The type of trifling animal tales recorded in Smith Sound has long been known, and differs fundamentally from animal tales common to the rest of the continent (article "Eskimo," in *Hastings' Cyclopedia of Religions*).

of most American origin myths that they deal with the transition from a mythological period to the modern age, brought about by a number of disconnected incidents, sometimes centering pre-eminently around the acts of one particular figure, sometimes by incidents distributed over a mass of tales that have not even the actions of one being as their connecting link. On the whole, the mythical world, earth, water, fire, sun and moon, summer and winter, animals and plants, are assumed as existing, although they may not possess their present forms, and although they may have been kept in some part of the world inaccessible to the human race. We are dealing, therefore, essentially with tales of expeditions in which, through cunning or force, the phenomena of nature are obtained for the use of all living beings; and with tales of transformation in which animals, land and water, obtain their present forms. We do not find in North America the genealogical sequence of worlds, one generated by another, that is so characteristic of Polynesia. The idea of creation, in the sense of a projection into objective existence of a world that pre-existed in the mind of a creator, is also almost entirely foreign to the American race. The thought that our world had a previous existence only as an idea in the mind of a superior being, and became objective reality by a will, is not the form in which the Indian conceives his mythology. There was no unorganized chaos preceding the origin of the world. Everything has always been in existence in objective form somewhere. This is even true of ceremonials and inventions, which were obtained by instruction given by beings of another world. There is, however, one notable exception to this general rule, for many Californian tribes possess origin tales which are expressions of the will of a powerful being who by his thoughts established the present order. When this type of tale became first known to us through the collections of Jeremiah Curtin, it appeared so strange, that the thought suggested itself that we might have here the expression of an individual mind rather than of tribal concepts, resulting either from the recorder's attitude or from that of an informant affected by foreign thought. Further collections, however, have corroborated the impression; and it now seems certain that in northern California there exists a group of true creation tales.

The statement here made needs some further restriction, inasmuch as we have quite a number of tales explaining the origin of animals and of mankind as the results of activities of superior beings. Thus we have stories which tell how men or food-animals were fashioned by the Creator out of wood, stone, clay, or grass; that they were given life, and thus became the beings that we see now. It is important to note that in these cases it is not a mere action of a creative will, but always the transformation of a material object, which forms the

essential feature of the tale. Furthermore, I believe it can be shown that many of these tales do not refer to a general creation of the whole species, but that they rather supply a local or temporary want. For instance, the Creator carves salmon out of wood, but they are not fit to serve his purpose. This does not imply that no salmon were in existence before that time, for we hear later on in the same cycle that the real salmon were obtained by a party that captured the fish in the mythical salmon country. The Creator, therefore, had to make artificially an object resembling the real salmon that existed somewhere else, but his unsuccessful attempt resulted in the origin of a new species. In another way this point may be brought out in the story of the origin of death, which appears as part of the Raven cycle of the North Pacific coast. Here Raven tries to create man first from stone, then from leaves. Since his attempts to give life to stones were unsuccessful, and man originated from leaves, man dies like leaves. The men thus created were, however, not the only ones in existence. Raven tried to create them only in order to obtain helpers in a particular kind of work in which he was engaged. Nevertheless the generalized explanation of death is attached to this story.

There are also marked differences not only in the manner in which origins are accounted for, but also in the extent to which these elements enter into tales. While in a large collection of Eskimo stories only from thirty-five to fifty phenomena are explained, the number is infinitely greater on the Western Plateaus. In the essay quoted before, Waterman states that ninety-eight Eskimo tales contain thirty-four explanations, while in a hundred and eighty-seven Plateau tales, two hundred and twenty-five explanations are found. This quite agrees with the impression that we receive by the perusal of tales. In some cases almost every tale is an origin tale, in others these are few and far between. For the determination of this element as characteristic of various areas, we require, of course, extensive collections, such as are available from a few tribes only. It is particularly necessary that the tales should not be gathered from a one-sided standpoint, — as, for instance, for a study of celestial myths or of animal tales, — because this might give an entirely erroneous impression. That typical differences exist can be determined even now. It is particularly striking that in some regions, as on the Western Plateaus, the explanatory element appears often as the basis of the plot; while other tribes, like the Eskimo, have a number of very trifling origin stories almost resembling animal fables. If these are excluded from the whole mass of explanatory tales, the contrast between various groups in regard to the importance of the explanatory element becomes particularly striking.

Marked differences occur also in the selection of the phenomena

that are explained. Among the southern Caddoan tribes the explanation of stars preponderates. Among the Plateau tribes the largest number of tales refer to characteristics of animals. Among the Blackfeet and Kwakiutl the mass of tales relate to ceremonials. Among the Southern tribes a great number are cosmogonic tales.

Related to this is also the more or less systematic grouping of the tales in larger cycles. It is but natural that in all those cases in which traits of animals form the subject of explanatory tales, the tales must be anecdotal in character and disconnected, even if one person should form the centre of the cycle. It is only when the origin tales are brought together in such a way that the mythological concepts develop into a systematic whole, that the origin stories assume the form of a more complex cosmogony. This point may be illustrated by the long record of the origin legend of Alaska collected by Swanton,<sup>1</sup> in which obviously a thoughtful informant has tried to assemble the whole mass of explanatory tales in the form of a connected myth. Critical study shows not only the entire lack of cohesion of the parts, but also the arbitrary character of the arrangement, which is contradicted by all other versions from the same region. Unifying elements are completely missing, since there is no elaboration of a cosmogonic concept that forms the background of the tale.

The same is no less true of the Kwakiutl, among whom the disconnected character of the origin tales is perhaps even more pronounced, since they refer in different ways to various aspects of the world; the origin of animals being treated in one way, the rise of social differences of the people in another way, and the supernatural basis of their religious ceremonials in still another manner. The contrast in form brought about by the systematization of mythical concepts may be seen clearly in the case of the Bellacoola, who have developed more definite notions of the organization of the world, and among whom, for this reason, the single stories, while still disconnected, are referred clearly to a background of systematized mythical concepts. The contrast between the disconnected origin tales and the elaborate cycles is most striking when we compare the disjointed tales of the Northwest with the long connected origin myths of the East as we find them among the Iroquois and Algonkin, and even more when we place them side by side with the complex myths from the Southwest.

On the whole, these features are characteristic of definite geographical areas. On the Western Plateaus it is almost entirely the grouping of the tales around one single hero that makes them into a loosely connected cycle. So far as we can discover, the single adventures are

<sup>1</sup> John R. Swanton, *Tlingit Myths and Texts* (Bulletin 39, Bureau of American Ethnology, pp. 80 *et seq.*).

disconnected, and only exceptionally a definite sequence of incidents occurs. The same is largely true of the origin tales of the East and of the Upper Mississippi region, excepting their complicated introductory parts. In other districts — as on the Pacific coast between Vancouver Island and central California — a somewhat more definite order is introduced by the localization of the tales. A transformer travels over the country and performs a series of actions, which are told in a definite order as his journeyings take him from place to place. Thus we have a definite order, but no inner connection between the incidents. Quite distinct in type are the origin tales in which the people themselves are brought to their present home by long-continued migration. It is characteristic of the northern part of the continent that there is no migration legend to speak of, that the people consider themselves as autochthonous. In the Southwest and in Mexico, on the other hand, particular stress is laid upon the emergence of the tribe from a lower world and upon its migrations, with which are connected many of the origin stories. This type, which in its whole setting is quite distinct from that of the North, occurs wherever Southern influences can be traced, as among the Arikara, a Caddoan tribe that migrated from the south northward to the Missouri River.

We may also recognize local characteristics in the details of the methods by which the present order of things is established. In the Plateau area, among the Eskimo, and in part at least in eastern North America, something happens that accidentally determines the future. When Grizzly-Bear, in a tussle, scratches Chipmunk's back, this gives rise to his stripes. If an animal jumps out of a canoe and breaks off his tail on the gunwale, this is the reason why it has a short tail. Since an animal wears down the hair of its bushy tail, it has a hairless tail now. Because the frog leaped on the moon's face, it stays there. In this area incidents in which transformations are the result of an intentional activity are quite rare, although the idea is not quite absent. In the East the concept of intentional transformation appears particularly in the tales treating of the origin of the earth and of ceremonies; on the Plateau it appears from time to time either in the form of councils held by the animals in order to decide how the world is to be arranged, or in contests between two antagonistic animals which desire different conditions. Thus we find in the Plateaus the story of Chipmunk and Bear, to which I referred before, essentially a contest which is to determine whether it shall always be day or always night; and in the Coyote cycle a contest which is to decide whether man shall be immortal.

On this basis a number of types of origins may be distinguished, — first, origins due to accidental, unintentional occurrences; second, the formation of the present order according to the decisions of a council

of animals; third, development due to the actions of two antagonistic beings, the one benevolent and wishing to make everything easy for man, the other one counteracting these intentions and creating the difficulties and hardships of life; as a fourth type we may distinguish the culture-hero tales, the narrative of the migration of men or deities who wander about and set things right. At the present time it is hardly possible to group the origin stories quite definitely from these points of view. In the extreme north the disorganized tale seems to prevail. On the plateaus of the northern United States and in part of the plains, the animal council plays an important rôle. California seems to be the principal home of the antagonistic formula, although this idea is also prominent among some Eastern tribes; and culture-hero tales appear locally on the North Pacific coast, but more prominently in the south.

We shall next turn to a consideration of the trickster tales. In a sense these have been referred to in the previous group, because many of the trickster tales are at the same time origin tales. If, for instance, Coyote tricks the birds by letting them dance near the fire, and their red eyes are accounted for in this way, we have here an origin story and a trickster tale. At present we are not concerned in this feature, but rather in the consideration of the question whether certain features can be found that are characteristic of the whole cycle as developed in various regions. First of all, it seems of interest to note the degree to which the whole group of tales is developed. It is absent among the Eskimo, moderately developed in California, probably not very prominent in the aboriginal myths of the Southwest, but most prolific on the Northwest coast, the Northern Plateaus, and in the East. Whether it is a marked feature of the Athapascan area cannot be decided at present. Some of the heroes of the trickster cycle have been noted before. Raven, Mink, Bluejay, on the Northwest coast; Coyote on the Plateaus; Old Man among the Blackfeet; Ishtiniki among the Ponca; Inkumni among the Assiniboin; Manabosho, Wishahka, and Glooscap among various Algonkin tribes, — are some of the prominent figures. Although a complete list of all the trickster incidents has not been made, it is fairly clear that a certain number are found practically wherever a trickster cycle occurs. I have already stated that one group of these tales is confined to the Western Plateaus, another one to the northern half of the continent. At present it is more important to note, that, besides these widely distributed elements, there seem to be in each area a number of local tales that have no such wide distribution. The characteristics of the tales appear most clearly when the whole mass of trickster tales in each region is studied. A comparison of the Raven, Mink, and Bluejay cycles is instructive. The background of the Raven stories is everywhere the greedy hunger

of Raven. Almost all of the Raven tales treat of Raven's endeavors to get plenty of food without effort; and the adventures relate to his attempts to cheat people out of their provisions and to the punishment doled out to him by those who have suffered from his tricks. Quite different in type are the Mink stories. Here we find throughout an erotic background. Mink tries to get possession of girls and of the wives of his friends, and his tricks have almost exclusively this one object. Occasionally only a trick based on his fondness for sea-eggs is introduced. The Bluejay adventures may be characterized in still another way. Generally it is his ambition to outdo his betters in games, on the hunt or in war, that brings him into trouble or induces him to win by trickery. He has neither a pronounced erotic nor a notably greedy character. The tricks of the Plateau cycles are not so easy to characterize, because the deeds of Coyote partake of all the characteristics just mentioned. Coyote attempts to get food, and his erotic adventures are fairly numerous; but on the whole these two groups are considerably outnumbered by tricks in which he tries to outdo his rivals.

The identification of trickster and transformer is a feature which deserves special notice. I have called attention to the fact — borne out by most of the mythologies in which trickster and culture-hero appear as one person — that the benefactions bestowed by the culture-hero are not given in an altruistic spirit, but that they are means by which he supplies his own needs.<sup>1</sup> Even in his heroic achievements he remains a trickster bent upon the satisfaction of his own desires. This feature may be observed distinctly in the Raven cycle of the Northwest coast. He liberates the sun, not because he pities mankind, but because he desires it; and the first use he tries to make of it is to compel fishermen to give him part of their catch. He gets the fresh water because he is thirsty, and unwillingly spills it all over the world while he is making his escape. He liberates the fish because he is hungry, and gets the tides in order to be able to gather shell-fish. Similar observations may be made in other mythological personages that embody the qualities of trickster and culture-hero. Wherever the desire to benefit mankind is a more marked trait of the cycle, there are generally two distinct persons, — one the trickster, the other the culture-hero. Thus the culture-hero of the Pacific coast gives man his arts, and is called "the one who sets things right." He is not a trickster, but all his actions have a distinct bearing upon the establishment of the modern order. Perhaps the most characteristic feature of these culture-hero tales is their lack of detail. Many are bare statements of the fact that something was different from the way it is now. The

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to James Teit, *Traditions of the Thompson River Indians of British Columbia* (Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society, vol. vi).

hero performs some very simple act, and ordains that these conditions shall be changed. It is only when the culture-hero concept rises to greater heights, as it does in the South, that these tales acquire greater complexity.

Here may also be mentioned the animal tales that belong neither to the trickster cycle nor to the origin tales. It is hardly possible to give a general characterization of these, and to distinguish local types, except in so far as the importance of the tale is concerned. In the Arctic and the adjoining parts of the continent, we find a considerable number of trifling animal stories that have hardly any plot. They are in part merely incidents descriptive of some characteristic of the animal. Some of these trifling stories are given the form of origin tales by making the incidents the cause from which arise certain bodily characteristics of the animals, but this is not often the case. In the more complex tales which occur all over the continent, the animals act according to their characteristic modes of life. Kingfisher dives, Fox is a swift runner, Beaver a good swimmer who lives in ponds, etc. Their character corresponds to their apparent behavior. Grizzly-Bear is overbearing and ill-tempered, Bluejay and Coyote are tricky. A sharp individual characterization, however, is not common.

We shall now turn to the third group of tales, those dealing with human society. These can only in part be characterized in the manner adopted heretofore. Some of their local color is due to the peculiar distribution of incidents which has been discussed before. On the whole, however, it is rather the plot as a whole that is characteristic. This may be exemplified by the incident of the faithless wife, which occurs all over the continent. The special form of the plot of the woman who has an animal or supernatural being or some object for a lover, whose actions are discovered by her husband, who disguises himself in her garments and who deceives and kills the paramour and later on his wife, is most characteristic of the Northern area, reaching from northeastern Siberia and the Eskimo district southward to the Mississippi basin.

Individualization of form may also be illustrated by the widely distributed incident of the deserted child who rescues his people when they are in distress. The special form of the plot — in which the child makes his parents and uncles ashamed, is deserted and then helped by animals that send him larger and larger game until many houses are filled with provisions, and in which the people offer him their daughters as wives — is characteristic only of the North Pacific coast. On the Plains the deserted boy escapes by the help of his protector, and becomes a powerful hunter. The analysis of the plots has not been carried through in such detail as to allow us to do more than point out the existence of characteristic types in definite areas.



Much more striking in this group of tales is their cultural setting, that reflects the principal occupation and interests of the people. I have attempted to give a reconstruction of the life of the Tsimshian, basing my data solely on the recorded mythology. As might perhaps be expected, all the essential features of their life — the village, its houses, the sea and land hunt, social relations — appear distinctly mirrored in this picture. It is, however, an incomplete picture. It would seem that certain aspects of life do not appeal to the imagination of the story-tellers, and are therefore not specifically expressed, not even implied in the setting of the story. It is very striking how little the animal tale — in the instance in question, the Raven cycle — contributes to this picture. It is also of interest to note that among the Tsimshian the secret societies — which, as we conclude from other evidence, have been introduced only lately — occupy a very unimportant part in the tales, while the potlatch and the use of crests are two of their most notable features. How accurately the cultural background of the life of the people is reflected by the form of its tales, appears in the diversity of form in which the life of various tribes of the North Pacific coast is mirrored in their traditional lore. Although the general form is much the same in all, the reconstructions based on the evidence of their tales exhibit sharp individualization, and emphasize the differences in social organization, in social customs, in the importance of the secret societies, and in the great diversity in the use of crests and other supernatural gifts. A perusal of the available collections makes it quite clear that in this sense the expression of the cultural life of the people contained in their tales gives to them a marked individuality, no matter what the incidents constituting the tales may be.

The reflection of the tribal life, which is characteristic of the tale, is also expressed in the mass of supernatural concepts that enter into it and form in part the scenic background on which the story develops, in part the machinery by means of which the action progresses. Wundt<sup>1</sup> and Waterman have called attention to the importance of distinctions between mythical concepts and tales. The cosmological background does not enter with equal intensity into the folk-tales of various groups. The Eskimo, who have clearly defined notions regarding the universe, do not introduce them to any great extent into their tales; while the various classes of fabulous tribes and beings, shamanism and witchcraft, occupy a prominent place. On the North Pacific coast the notions regarding the universe are on the whole vague and contradictory; nevertheless visits to the sky play an important rôle in the tales. The ideas regarding a ladder leading to heaven, and journeys across the ocean to fabulous countries, also

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie*, vol. ii, part 3 (1909), p. 19.

enter into the make-up of the Northwest-coast traditions. In the South, on the other hand, the notions in regard to the centre of the world, the lower world, and the four points of the compass, are of importance.

The groups of fabulous beings that appear in each area exhibit also sharp characteristics; as the ice giants of the Iroquois and eastern Algonkin, the stupid giants of the Shoshoni and Kutenai, or the water-monsters of the South, the horned serpents of eastern America, the double-headed serpent of the coast of British Columbia, the giant thunder-bird of Vancouver Island, and the various forms of thunderers that are found among the different tribes of the continent.

Skinner<sup>1</sup> has recently called attention to the magical machinery that appears in the tales of human adventure among the Central Algonkin tribes. These features also characterize the tales of different areas. This subject has not been analyzed in sufficient detail to allow a definite grouping, but enough is known to indicate that a natural arrangement will result which will largely conform to cultural divisions.

This feature is still further emphasized when we direct our attention to the main plot of the story. I have shown that among the Kwakiutl the plot of most stories is the authentication of the privileges of a social division or of a secret society. Wissler has brought out a similar point in his discussion of Blackfoot tales,<sup>2</sup> many of which seem to explain ritualistic origins, the rituals themselves being in part dramatic interpretations of the narratives. The Pawnee and Pueblo stories reflect in the same way the ritualistic interests of the people. In this sense we may perhaps say without exaggeration that the folk-tales of each tribe are markedly set off from those of all other tribes, because they give a faithful picture of the mode of life and of the chief interests that have prevailed among the people during the last few generations. These features appear most clearly in the study of their hero-tales. It is therefore particularly in this group that an analogy between the folk-tale and the modern novel is found. The tales dealing with the feats of men are more plastic than those relating to the exploits of animals, although the animal world, to the mind of the Indian, was not so very different from our own.

The events occurring among the animals are less individualized so far as the tribal mode of life is concerned. At best we may infer from them whether we deal with buffalo-hunters of the Plains, fishermen of the Western coast, people of the Arctic or of the Southern desert. The more complex activities of the tribe appear rarely pictured in them, and then only incidentally.

<sup>1</sup> A. Skinner, *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xxvii (1914), pp. 97-100.

<sup>2</sup> Clark Wissler and D. C. Duvall, *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians* (Anthropological Papers, American Museum of Natural History, vol. ii, p. 12).

In the human tale the narrator gives us a certain amount of characterization of individuals, of their emotions, — like pity and love, — of their courage and cowardice, on which rests the plot of the story. The development of individual character does not proceed beyond this point. We do not find more than schematic types, which are, however, forms that occur in the every-day life of the people. On the contrary, the origin and trickster cycles deal with types that are either so impersonal that they do not represent any individual, or are merely the personification of greed, amorousness, or silly ambition. Wherever there is individuality of character, it is rather the expression of the apparent nature of the personified animal, not the character that fits particularly well into human society.

Considering the characteristics of the human tale as a whole, we may say that in all probability future study will show that its principal characteristics may be well defined by the cultural areas of the continent. How close this correspondence may be remains to be seen. The problem is an interesting and important one, because it is obvious that the tales, while readily adaptable, do not follow all the aspects of tribal life with equal ease, and a certain lack of adjustment may become apparent. This will serve as a valuable clew in the further study of the development of tribal customs and of the history of the distribution of tales. I have pointed out the probability of such incomplete adjustment in the case of the Kwakiutl, and Wissler has made a similar point in regard to the Blackfeet.

While much remains to be done in the study of the local characteristics of folk-tales in regard to the points referred to, a still wider field of work is open in all that concerns their purely formal character, and I can do no more than point out the necessity of study of this subject. On the basis of the material hitherto collected, we are hardly in a position to speak of the literary form of the tales. I am inclined to count among their formal traits the typical repetition of the same incident that is found among many tribes; or the misfortunes that befall a number of brothers, until the last one is successful in his undertaking. These have the purpose of exciting the interest and leading the hearer to anticipate the climax with increased eagerness. Quite different from this is a device used by the Tsimshian, who lead up to a climax by letting an unfortunate person be helped in a very insignificant way. The help extended to him becomes more and more potent, until the climax is reached, in which the sufferer becomes the fortunate possessor of power and wealth.

Another artistic device that is used by many tribes to assist in the characterization of the actors is the use of artificial changes in speech. Thus among the Kwakiutl the Mink cannot pronounce the sound *ts*, among the Kutenai Coyote cannot pronounce *s*, among the Chi-

nook the animals speak different dialects. Dr. Sapir<sup>1</sup> has called attention to the development of this feature among the Shoshoni and Nootka.

The literary style is most readily recognized in the poetic parts of tales; but, since these fall mostly outside of the purely narrative part of the stories, I do not enter into this subject. We may contrast the simplicity of style of the Northwest coast — where poems consist sometimes of the introduction of a single word into a musical line, the music being carried on by a burden, sometimes of a purely formal enumeration of the powers of supernatural beings — with the metaphoric expression and fine feeling for beauty that pervade the poetry of the Southwestern Indians. Equally distinct are the rhythmic structures that are used by the Indians of various areas.<sup>2</sup> We must be satisfied here with a mere hint at the significance of these data. The desire may be expressed, however, that greater care should be taken in the collection of the material to make possible a thorough study of this aspect of our subject.

#### V. RECENT HISTORY OF AMERICAN FOLK-TALES.

Our considerations allow us to draw a number of inferences in regard to the history of American folk-tales. We have seen that there is no tribe in North America whose tales can be considered as purely local products uninfluenced by foreign elements. On the contrary, we have found that some tales are distributed over almost the whole continent, others over more or less extended parts of the country. We have seen, furthermore, that the tales of each particular area have developed a peculiar literary style, which is an expression of the mode of life and of the form of thought of the people; that the actors who appear in the various tales are quite distinct in different parts of the country; and that the associated explanatory elements depend entirely upon the different styles of thought. In one case the tales are used to explain features of the heavenly bodies; in others, forms of the land, of animals or of rituals, according to the chief interests of the people. It is fully borne out by the facts brought forward, that actors, explanatory tendencies, cultural setting, and literary form, of all modern American tales, have undergone constant and fundamental changes. If we admit this, it follows that the explanations that are found in modern tales must be considered almost entirely as recent adaptations of the story, not as its integral parts; and neither they nor the names of the actors reveal to us what the story may have been in its original

<sup>1</sup> E. Sapir, "Song Recitative in Paiute Mythology" (*The Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xxiii, 1910, pp. 456-457).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Alice C. Fletcher, *The Hako* (22d Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, part 2, pp. 282-368).

form — if we may speak of such a form. Everything appears rather in flux. For this reason the attempt to interpret the history of the modern tale as a reflection of the observation of nature is obviously not justifiable. The data of American folk-lore do not furnish us with a single example that would prove that this process has contributed to the modern development of folk-tales. It would almost seem safer to say that the creative power that has manifested itself in modern times is very weak, and that the bulk of our tales consist of combinations and recombinations of old themes. At the same time the marked differentiation in the style of composition shows that the mainspring in the formation of the modern tale must have been an artistic one. We observe in them not only the result of the play of imagination with favorite themes, but also the determination of the form of imaginative processes by antecedent types, which is the characteristic trait of artistic production of all times and of all races and peoples. I am therefore inclined to consider the folk-tale primarily and fundamentally as a work of primitive art. The explanatory element would then appear, not as an expression of native philosophy, but rather as an artistic finishing touch required for the tale wherever the art of story-telling demands it. Instead of being the mainspring of the story, it becomes in one case a stylistic embellishment, while in another it is required to give an impressive setting. In either case the occurrence of the explanation cannot be reduced to a rationalizing activity of primitive man.

In a sense these results of our studies of American folk-lore are unsatisfactory, because they lead us only to recognize a constant play with old themes, variations in explanatory elements attached to them, and the tendency to develop various types of artistic style. They do not bring us any nearer to an understanding of the origin of the themes, explanations, and styles. If we want to carry on our investigation into a remoter past, it may be well to ask, first of all, how long the present development of mosaics of different style may have continued; whether there is any proof that some tribes have been the originators from whom others derived much of their lore; and whether we have any evidence of spontaneous invention that may have influenced large territories.

Since historical data are not available, we are confined to the application of an inductive method of inquiry. We may ask how large a portion of the folk-tales of a tribe are its sole property, and how many they share with other tribes. If a comparison of this kind should show a large number of elements that are the sole property of one tribe, while others have only little that is their exclusive property, it would seem justifiable to consider the former as originators, the latter as recipients; and we may conclude either that their own older folk-tales have disappeared or that they possessed very few only. It is not easy

to form a fair judgment of the originality of the folk-tales of each tribe in the manner here suggested, because the collections are unequally complete, and because collectors or narrators are liable to give preference to one particular kind of tale to the exclusion of others. It is always difficult to base inferences on the apparent absence of certain features that may be discovered, after all, to exist; and this seems particularly difficult in our case. Still it might be possible to compare at least certain definite cycles that have been collected fairly fully, and that occur with equal exuberance in various areas; as, for instance, the trickster cycles of the Plains. On the whole, I gain the impression that not a single tribe appears as possessing considerably more originality than another.

One interesting point appears with great clearness; namely, the power of tales of certain types to become a prolific source of tales of similar import, provided the original tales are of social importance in the life of the people. Thus the Kwakiutl have apparently a considerable originality among their neighbors on the North Pacific coast, because all the numerous social divisions and secret societies of the tribe possess origin tales of the same type; so that a complete list would probably include hundreds of stories more or less strictly built on the same pattern. The ritualistic tales of the Blackfeet form another group of this kind; and the same may be true of the tales of the Mackenzie area dealing with the marriages between human beings and animals. In these cases we deal with one particular style of story, that has gained great popularity, and therefore appears in an endless number of variants.

Another condition that may lead to a strong individuality in a certain group develops when the tales are placed in the keeping of a small class of priests or chiefs, as the case may be. The more important the tale becomes on account of its association with the privileges and rituals of certain sections of the tribe, and the greater the emotional and social values of the customs with which it is associated, the more have the keepers of the ritual brooded over it in all its aspects; and with this we find a systematic development of both tale and ritual. This accounts for the relation between the occurrence of complex rituals in charge of a priestly class or of chiefs, and of long myths which have an esoteric significance. The parallelism of distribution of religious or social groups led by single individuals and of complex mythologies is so striking, that there can be little doubt in regard to their psychological connection. The Mexicans, the Pueblo tribes, the Pawnee, the Bellacoola, the Maidu,<sup>1</sup> may be given as examples. The

<sup>1</sup> Roland B. Dixon, who has pointed out the systematic character of their mythology, finds some difficulty in accounting for it, considering the simple economic and artistic life of the people. His own descriptions, however, show the great importance of personal leadership in all religious affairs of the tribe (*Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, vol. xvii).

contrast between a disorganized mass of folk-tales and the more systematic mythologies seems to lie, therefore, in the introduction of an element of *individual* creation in the latter. The priest or chief as a poet or thinker takes hold of the folk-traditions and of isolated rituals and elaborates them in dramatic and poetic form. Their systematization is brought about by the centralization of thought in one mind. Under the social conditions in which the Indians live, the keeper transfers his sacred knowledge in an impressive manner to his successor. The forms in which the sacred teachings appear at the present time are therefore the cumulative effect of systematic elaboration by individuals, that has progressed through generations.

This origin of the complex of myth and ritual makes it also intelligible why among some tribes the myths of sub-groups should be contradictory. An instance of this are the Bellacoola, among whom the tradition is in the keeping of the chief of the village community, and among whom each community has a different concept in regard to its origins. These contradictory traditions are the result of individual thought in each community, and do not come into conflict, because the audience identifies itself with the reciting chief, and the truth of one poetic creation does not destroy the truth of another one.

For a correct interpretation of these art-productions we must also bear in mind that the materials for the systematic composition are the disconnected folk-tales and lesser rites of the tribe, which have been welded into a whole. From a psychological point of view, it is therefore not justifiable to consider the exoteric tales, as is so often done, degenerate fragments of esoteric teaching. It is true that they themselves undergo changes due to the influence of the priestly doctrine, but there is a constant giving and taking; and nowhere in America has the individual artist freed himself of the fetters of the type of thought expressed in the disjointed folk-tales. The proof for this contention is found in the sameness of the elements that enter into the tales of tribes with systematic mythology and of those without it.

The only alternative explanation of the observed phenomenon would be the assumption that all this material had its origin in more highly developed and systematized mythologies. It might be claimed that the remains of the Ohio mounds, the highly-developed artistic industries of the ancient inhabitants of the Lower Mississippi, and of the cliff-dwellings, prove that a high style of civilization must have existed in many parts of the country, where at a later period only less complex cultural forms were found. The elaborateness of religious ceremonial of these times is proved by the characteristics of archæological finds. It is quite true that in the border area of Mexico, including under this term the whole region just mentioned, many fluctuations in cultural

development must have occurred; but this does not prove their existence over the whole continent. Furthermore, the individuality of each folk-loristic area is such, that we must count the imaginative productiveness of each tribe as an important element in the development of the present situation. From this point of view, inquiries into the independence of each area, rather than investigations of the effect of diffusion, will be of the greatest value. The theory of degeneration is not suggested by any facts; and I fail entirely to see how the peculiar form of American systematic mythology can be explained, except as the result of an artistic elaboration of the disconnected folk-tales, and how the arbitrary character of its thought, which parallels primitive concepts, can be interpreted, except as the result of priestly speculation based on the themes found in folk-tales.

#### VI. MYTHOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN FOLK-TALES.

Our consideration of American folk-tales has so far dealt with their later history. The result of this inquiry will help us in the treatment of the question, What may have been the origin of these tales? It is obvious that in an historical inquiry for which no literary record of ancient mythology is available, we must try first of all to establish the processes that are active at the present time. There is no reason for assuming that similar processes should not have been active in earlier times, at least as long as the types of human culture were approximately on the same level as they are now. The art-productions of the Magdalenian period show how far back the beginning of these conditions may be placed; and so far we have no evidence that indicates that the American race as such has ever passed through a time in which its mental characteristics were different from those of modern man. The antiquity of cultural achievement in Mexico, the finds made in ancient shell-heaps, prove that for thousands of years man in America has been in possession of a type of cultural development not inferior to that of the modern, more primitive tribes. It may therefore be inferred that the processes that are going on now have been going on for a very long period. Constant diffusion of the elements of stories, and elaboration of new local types of composition, must have been the essential characteristic of the history of folk-tales. On the whole, invention of new themes must have been rare; and where it occurred, it was determined by the prevailing type of composition.

Disregarding the actors that appear in the stories, their contents deal almost throughout with events that may occur in human society, sometimes with plausible events, more often with fantastic adventures that cannot have their origin in actual human experiences. From these facts two problems develop that have given rise to endless speculation and discussion, — the first, Why are these human tales told of



animals, of the heavenly bodies, and of personified natural phenomena? the other, Why is it that certain fantastic elements have a world-wide distribution?

The transfer of human experience to animals and personified objects has given rise to the view that all tales of this type are nature myths or an expression of the naïve primitive conception of nature. It has been clearly recognized that the themes are taken from human life, and used to express the observation of nature. The first question to be answered is therefore, How does it happen that the tales are so often removed from the domain of human society? Wundt has discussed this question in his comprehensive work on mythology,<sup>1</sup> in so far as the personification of nature is concerned. This discussion refers to mythological concepts, not to the tales as such. It is obvious, however, that once the human character of animals and objects is given, the tales become applicable to them.

Another element may have helped in the development of animal tales, once the personification was established. In folk-tales each human being is considered as a distinct individual, and the mere name of a person does not characterize the individual. Moreover, named individuals are not very common in American folk-tales. The animal, on the other hand, is immortal. From the bones of the killed game arises the same individual hale and sound, and thus continues its existence indefinitely. Therefore the species, particularly in the mythological period, is conceived as one individual, or at most as a family group. This may also have helped to create the normative character of the tales. If an animal rubbed the hair off its tail, then all animals that are its descendants have the same kind of a tail. If all the thunder-birds were killed except one, their loss of power becomes permanent. I presume the identification of species and of individuals which is inherent in the personification of nature was an important element contributing to the development of this concept. It goes without saying that the result was not obtained by conscious reasoning. The substitution of individual for species merely favored the explanatory features of animal tales. The tendency to substitute for these transformations others in which events were due to the decision of a council, or where they were ordained by a culture-hero, may be due to a feeling of dissatisfaction with the simple type of transformation and the condensation of the whole species into one individual.

In all these tales the explanatory element must be considered as an idea that arose in the mind of the narrator suddenly by an associative process. I differ from Wundt in the importance that I ascribe to the looseness of connection between explanatory elements and the tale, a phenomenon to which he also refers.<sup>2</sup> It is not simply the appercep-

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii, part 1 (1905), pp. 577 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Part 3, p. 183.

tive process, in which the subjective emotions are transferred to the object, that gives rise to the explanatory element in the tales; but the elements of mythological concepts are thoughts suggested first of all by the appropriateness of the pre-existing tale, and therefore depended in the first instance upon its literary form. For this reason the great difference in the character of folk-tales of America and those of Africa does not appear to me as a difference in the stages of their development. The moralizing tendency of the African tale is an art-form that has been typical for the Negro, but foreign to the American; and I can see no genetic connection between the explanatory and the moralizing tale.

While these considerations make the animal tale intelligible, they are not by any means a satisfactory explanation of the great importance of animal and nature tales in the folk-lore of all the people of the world; and it would seem that at present we have to accept this as one of the fundamental facts of mythology, without being able to give an adequate reason for its development.

The last question that we have to discuss is the significance of those traits of folk-lore that are of world-wide occurrence. Particularly in reference to this fact the claim is made that the wide distribution of the same elements can be explained only when we assume that they are derived from a direct observation of nature, and that for this reason they appear to primitive man as obvious facts. This subject has been treated fully by Ehrenreich<sup>1</sup> and other representatives of that mythological school which derives the origin of myths from the impressions that man received from nature, particularly from the heavenly orbs.

So far as I can see, all that has been done by these investigations is to show that when we start with the hypothesis that myths are derived from the impressions conveyed by the heavenly bodies, we can fit the incidents of myths into this hypothesis by interpreting their features accordingly. Lessmann<sup>2</sup> even goes so far as to state definitely that whatever cannot be derived from characteristics of the moon is not mythology. This, of course, ends all possible discussion of the relation between folk-tales and myths. In the passage referred to, Ehrenreich says that the phases of the moon produce certain types of myths. The new moon is represented in the supernatural birth through the side of the mother, and in the incident of a new-born hero lying in a manger or shell. The full moon is the hero in the fulness of his power and after his victories over dark demons. The waning of the moon is the cutting-up or the slow swallowing of the hero's body. The new moon is represented in decapitations with a sword, in test

<sup>1</sup> P. Ehrenreich, *Die allgemeine Mythologie und ihre ethnologischen Grundlagen*, pp. 100 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> H. Lessmann, *Aufgaben und Ziele der vergleichenden Mythenforschung* (Mythologische Bibliothek, I<sup>4</sup>, pp. 31 *et seq.*).

by fire, or in the cutting of sinews. In this enumeration of interpretations I cannot see any proof of his thesis, since he does not show that the same ideas may not have developed in some other way.<sup>1</sup>

Ehrenreich and other adherents of the modern cosmogonic school make the fundamental assumption that myths must represent phenomena actually seen,—a theory that seems to me based on a misconception of the imaginative process. The productions of imagination are not by any means the images of sense-experiences, although they are dependent upon them; but in their creation the emotional life plays an important rôle. When we are filled with an ardent desire, imagination lets us see the desire fulfilled. As a phenomenon strikes us with wonder, its normal features will be weakened and the wonderful element will be emphasized. When we are threatened by danger, the cause of our fear will impress us as endowed with extraordinary powers. It is a common characteristic of all these situations that the actual sense-experience may either be exaggerated or turned into its opposite, and that the impossible fulfilment of a wish is realized. After the death of a dear relative, neither we nor primitive man speculate as to what may have become of his soul; but we feel a burning wish to undo what has happened, and in the free play of fancy we see the dead come back to life. The slain leader in battle whose dismembered body is found, is seen restored to full vigor. The warrior surrounded by enemies, when all means of retreat are cut off, will wish to pass unseen through the ranks of the foes, and in a strong imagination the wish will become a reality. Many of the ideas that are common to all mythologies may thus be readily understood, and there is no need to think of the waning and waxing moon when we hear of the cutting-up or flaying of a person, and of his revival. These are ideas that are readily suggested by the very fact that the ordinary processes of imagination must call them forth.

No less is this true in the forms of demons which can easily be understood as fanciful distortions of experiences. Laistner's theory of the importance of the nightmare<sup>2</sup> as giving rise to many of these forms is suggestive; perhaps not in the sense in which he formulates it, — because the form of the nightmare will in all probability depend upon the ideas that are current in the belief of the people, — but because dreams are simply one form in which the creations of imagination appear, and because they indicate what unexpected forms the fear-inspiring apparition may take. Still other mythic forms may be explained by the æsthetic transformations produced by the power of imagination. It is not only that the beauty of form is exaggerated,

<sup>1</sup> See also the criticism of A. van Gennep, in his *Réligions, mœurs et légendes*, pp. 111 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Laistner, *Das Rätsel der Sphinx*.

but the comic or tragic elements lead equally to transformations of sense-experience. I think it is quite possible to explain in this way the beautiful shining persons with bright hair, and also the cripples with distorted bodies, covered with warts and other disfigurements.

In short, there is hardly a single trait of all the mythologies that does not reflect naturally, by exaggeration or by contrast, the ordinary sense-experiences of man. It is only when we deny that these processes are characteristic of the imagination that we are confronted with any difficulty, and that we have to look for the origin of these forms outside of human society. As compared to this very simple view of the origin of the elementary forms of myths, the attempt to seek their prototypes in the sky seems to my mind far-fetched. It may also be said in favor of this view, that the combination of features that are demanded as characteristic of the sun, the moon, or other personified beings, appear only seldom combined in one and the same mythical figure. This has been clearly demonstrated by Lowie.<sup>1</sup>

These considerations show also that psychological conditions may bring about similarity of ideas without an underlying historical connection, and that the emphasis laid on the historical side must be supported by careful inquiry into those features in the life of man that may be readily explained by similarities in the reactions of the mind. Methodologically the proof of such independent origin of similar phenomena offers much more serious difficulties than a satisfactory proof of historical connection. The safeguards that must be demanded here are analogous to those previously described.<sup>2</sup> As we demanded before, as criteria of historical connection, actual evidence of transmission, or at least clear proof of the existence of lines of transmission and of the identity of subject-matter, so we must now call for proof of the lack of historical connection or of the lack of identity of phenomena. Obviously these proofs are much more difficult to give. If we were to confine ourselves to the evidence contained in folk-tales, it might be an impossible task to prove in a convincing manner the independent origin of tales, because the possibility of the transmission of a single idea always exists. It is only on the basis of our knowledge of the limitations of areas over which inventions, art-forms, and other cultural achievements, have spread, that we can give a basis for safer conclusions. On account of the sharp contrast between America and the Old World in the material basis of civilization, and the restriction of imported material to the northwestern part of the continent, to which we have already referred, we are safe in assuming that similar cultural traits that occurred in pre-Columbian time in the southern parts of the two continental areas are of independent origin. In more

<sup>1</sup> Robert H. Lowie, "The Test-Theme," etc. (*Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xxi, 1908, p. 101).

<sup>2</sup> See p. 381.

restricted areas it is all but impossible to give satisfactory proof of the absence of contact.

More satisfactory are our means for determining the lack of identity of apparently analogous phenomena. Historical inquiry shows that similar ideas do not always arise from the same preceding conditions; that either their suggested identity does not exist or the similarity of form is due to an assimilation of phenomena that are distinct in origin, but develop under similar social stress. When a proof of this type can be given, and the psychological processes involved are clearly intelligible, there is good reason for assuming an independent origin of the ideas.

A case in point is presented by the so-called "sacred" numbers.<sup>1</sup> I am not inclined to look at these primarily as something of transcendental mystic value; it seems to me more plausible that the concept developed from the æsthetic values of rhythmic repetition. Its emotional effect is obviously inherent in the human mind; and the artistic use of repetition may be observed wherever the sacred number exists, and where it is not only referred to a number of distinct objects, but is also used in repetitions of tunes, words, elements of literary composition and of actions. Thus the difference in favorite rhythms may account for the occurrence of different sacred numbers; and since the preference for a definite number is a general psychological phenomenon, their occurrence must not be due to historical transmission, but may be considered as based on general psychological facts. The differences between the sacred numbers would then appear as different manifestations of this mental reaction. In the same way the idea of revival of the dead, or of the power to escape unseen, is simple reaction of the imagination, and is not due, wherever it occurs, to a common historical source. These ideas develop naturally into similar incidents in stories that occur in regions widely apart, and must be interpreted as the effect of psychological processes that bring about a convergent development in certain aspects of the tales. An instructive example is presented by the tales of the origin of death. The idea of the origin of death is readily accounted for by the desire to see the dead alive again, which often must have been formulated as the wish that there should be no death. The behavior of man in all societies proves the truth of this statement. Thus the imaginative processes are set in motion which construct a deathless world, and from this initial point develop the stories of the introduction of death in accordance with the literary types of transformation stories. The mere occurrence of stories of the origin of death — in one place due to the miscarriage of a message conveyed by an animal, in others by a bet or a quarrel between two beings — is not a proof of common origin. This proof

<sup>1</sup> See also p. 399.

requires identity of the stories. We can even understand how, under these conditions, stories of similar literary type may become almost identical in form without having a common origin. Where the line is to be drawn between these two types of development cannot be definitely decided. In extreme cases it will be possible to determine this with a high degree of probability; but a wide range of material will always remain, in which no decision can be made.

The limitation of the application of the historical method described here defines also our attitude towards the Pan-Aryan, and Pan-Babylonian theories. The identification of the elements of different folk-tales made by the adherents of these theories are not acceptable from our methodological standpoint. The proofs of dissemination are not of the character demanded by us. The psychological basis for the assumption of an imaginative unproductiveness of all the races of man, with the exception of one or two, cannot be proved; and the origin of the myth in the manner demanded by the theories does not seem plausible.

The essential problem regarding the ultimate origin of mythologies remains, — why human tales are preferably attached to animals, celestial bodies, and other personified phenomena of nature. It is clear enough that personification makes the transfer possible, and that the distinctness and individualization of species of animals and of personified phenomena set them off more clearly as characters of a tale than the undifferentiated members of mankind. It seems to me, however, that the reason for their preponderance in the tales of most tribes of the world has not been adequately given.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For references to literature see Robert H. Lowie, "The Test-Theme," etc. (*Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xxi, pp. 146-148); T. T. Waterman, "The Explanatory Element," etc. (*Ibid.*, vol. xxvii, pp. 50-54); also footnote 4, p. 383.